

## ELDERBERRY COMMONS

### FAQ

#### **1. Is Elderberry Commons a homeless shelter?**

No, Elderberry Commons is not a homeless shelter. Elderberry Commons is a permanent supportive housing development. It provides permanent housing with supportive services, such as mental health services, for households experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Permanent housing means there is no limit on how long a resident may live in the development.

#### **2. Who owns and runs Elderberry Commons?**

Elderberry Commons is owned and operated by Burbank Housing, who provides on site property management. West County Community Services (WCCS) provides the on-site supportive services.

In 2020, the Sonoma County Community Development Commission purchased the Sebastopol Inn through Project Homekey, a program of the state of California that provides local government agencies with money to purchase and rehabilitate housing for at-risk populations. Sonoma County initially used the property as a non-congregate shelter during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024, Community Development Commission (CDC) sold the property to Burbank Housing for the purpose of converting the property into a permanent supportive housing development. The property was transferred on July 5, 2024.

The Community Development Commission (CDC) is a County agency, and is governed the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, acting as the Commissioners of the Community Development Commission (CDC).

#### **3. Does the City supervise West County Community Services (WCCS) at Elderberry Commons?**

No, the City does not supervise or control the work done by West County Community Services (WCCS) at Elderberry Commons. The City has separate agreements with West County Community Services (WCCS) to provide homeless outreach services within the City of Sebastopol, but those agreements are unrelated to the work West County Community Services (WCCS) performs at Elderberry Commons.

**4. Did the City approve the purchase of the Sebastopol Inn to be used as a shelter?**

No, the City did not approve of the purchase of the Sebastopol Inn to be used as non-congregate shelter. Prior to the purchase of the Sebastopol Inn by the Community Development Commission (CDC), representatives of the County gave a presentation on the potential purchase during the August 11, 2020 City Council meeting. During that meeting, the County reiterated that the decision about whether to purchase the property and use it as a non-congregate shelter was the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors', acting as the Commissioners of the Community Development Commission, decision alone and did not require approval from the City Council. The City Council never voted on the proposed purchase of the property by the CDC.

Under State law, the County is not subject to the City's Zoning Code or other City ordinances. Similarly, entities leasing property from the County in order to carry out a County project or activity, are exempt from the City's Zoning Code.

**5. Did the City approve of the creation of Elderberry Commons as a permanent supportive housing project?**

No, the City did not approve of the creation of Elderberry Commons as a permanent supportive housing project, and the City Council never voted on the issue.

Once the property was sold to Burbank Housing, the property became subject to the City's Zoning Code and other laws. However, the City's Zoning Code allows affordable housing projects as a permitted use on the property, and so no conditional use permit was required from the City for the project (see next questions about additional role of State law). Similarly, design review is only required for substantial exterior modifications to existing buildings. The work to convert the Sebastopol Inn into Elderberry Commons was primarily internal, and therefore no design review was required.

**6. Can the City change its zoning to prevent permanent supporting housing projects?**

Generally, no. Under state law, supportive housing developments are a by-right use in all zones where multifamily residential or mixed-use residential uses are permitted. Accordingly, the City cannot require a conditional use permit or prohibit supportive housing developments in these zones.

**7. Will the County reimburse the City for costs related to police responses at Elderberry Commons?**

No, the County has informed the City it will not reimburse the City for those costs.

**8. Has the City received funding from the County or State to support homeless outreach services?**

The City does not currently receive any funding from the County or State to support homeless outreach services. However, the City is working closely with the Sonoma County Department of Health Services to identify possible sources of funding to assist the City.

**9. How are applicants selected to live at Elderberry Commons. Does the City have any say?**

No, the City has no role in selecting residents to live in Elderberry Commons. Project Homekey requires that residents be selected through the Sonoma County Coordinated Entry system. Coordinated Entry prioritizes those who are determined to be most in need of assistance, and selects residents from throughout Sonoma County, not just from within Sebastopol. More information about Coordinated Entry is available [here](#).